

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Reflections

The way of being, of life, of our ancestors was grounded in the sacred. They called it Wyrð. I believe that the way of Wyrð holds lessons for us still, touching as it does upon many of those aspects of our contemporary world for which we are today seeking inspiration. Throughout the book I have sought to address some of the implications of the wisdom of our ancestors for our lives in the modern world, and how we might go about learning from them. In this final chapter, as a kind of pulling together of threads, I have picked out some of the more significant ideas from the culture of our ancestors of ancient Europe in the context of our current concerns. Identifying and articulating the important questions is an urgent requirement for us today; I offer the following thoughts as a contribution to this process rather than as a catalogue of my own 'answers'.

— The Natural Connection —

The tribespeople of early Europe sustained a close harmony, an empathy, a deep spirit of cooperation between their lives and the natural landscape of which they were a part. In contemporary Western culture we have become separated from our environment and this has reaped

some unpleasant ecological rewards. We are now scrambling to reconnect with nature. Our ancestors had rituals of some sophistication, meditations, celebrations, dynamic connecting processes between themselves and the landscape. They sustained a kind of spiritual and psychological umbilical cord with the land.

Their example leads me to feel that we should reconsider very carefully the kind of psychological relationship we have with our environment, and how it may be modified, corrected, inspired towards a view which heals the wounds we have wrought on ourselves and the land. Complementing our ongoing biological and economic analyses of ecological systems, we need to establish once again a sacred grounding as a fundamental prerequisite for the development of a deep ecology. One of the attractions of the sacred ways of Wyrð is the acceptance of the simple givens, the energy parameters of nature, a placing of oneself spiritually in harmony with the environment. We need to rebalance our view, to intervene within the natural parameters, rather than violating them chronically as we do now.

One benefit for us in reaching out to the sacred in this way is that it might help us to acknowledge the complexity, the magnificent multiplicity of factors which dazzle and delight when we experience our environment aesthetically, but which we necessarily disregard when we try to deal with it scientifically. It is as if the two are entirely separate.

But we now know, towards the end of the second millennium, that science cannot answer all our questions. There are many aspects of life which fall outside the empirical frame. Attunement entails a recognition that the multiplicity of variables in any natural setting are far too complex ever to be completely controlled by a scientifically based engineering process. This acceptance is a crucial first step towards a sacred dimension in a new ecological psychology. It is a dangerous and unsettling step, for it means that we give up the illusion of control. We settle instead for our place in the large whole. We cannot control it, but we can live within it.

Perhaps this, then, is a fundamental lesson from our ancestors: to have an open mind and an open heart about the unknown, and to

turn outward into the complexity of our environment to find ways of embracing and attuning to it.

— Power of Imagery —

Today, in some ways and rather surprisingly, we seem to be less sophisticated and aware than were our ancestors in appreciating the deep impact on the way we understand ourselves of the images which permeate our lives. The tribespeople of ancient Europe used prominent images to focus their lives in many ways, because images can embody so much information and at the same time carry the psychological and the sacred in the same image. Today our environment is image-rich, but mainly for the purposes of selling goods or providing entertainment. Increasingly we rely for models of how we function, communicate and relate with one another on machine-models — especially that of the computer.

We need to be aware and cautious of the ramifications of such a model for our general self-understanding. Computational language is far better, for example, at modelling human thinking than human feeling, and our increasing use of such machine languages to attempt to describe organic and complex social processes reveals just how seductive such images can be.

One central image, among many, used by the tribespeople of early Europe featured the World Tree. This image differed crucially from the computer metaphors we use now in that it occurs naturally outside human creation. And like other organic images in the culture of the early Europeans it gave a sense of life which transcends our anthropomorphism, the human-centred world view which leaves us feeling separated and alienated from our environment. The tree linked the early Europeans to the world of which they were a part, the organic environment. Such a world view, which so centrally connects humans and the environment, means that to be alienated from nature is to be alienated from a part of ourselves. I suspect that deep within us we realise this; and the loss is profound.

Where our modern outlook differs crucially and, ultimately, tragically from that of the indigenous cultures of today and the

tribespeople of early Europe is in assuming that the 'everyday waking state' sees reality more accurately than do imaginal states of mind. If we take seriously the emotional as well as the physical experience of landscape, for example, then the internal and external are virtually indistinguishable. There are no hard and fast dividing lines between what is us and what is our environment. Since the actual 'creation' of our sense-world is an interaction between the 'external' of the material world and the 'internal' of our nervous system, the cognitive and the emotional, we need languages which fully reflect this complexity.

The pragmatic mind-set is fundamental to conducting the business of everyday life, but what we are missing, and chronically searching for in healing our split from the environment, is that magically charged crack between the physical and mythological, the observable and unobservable, the pragmatic and the sacred.

— The Night —

Night came first. The rhythm of time was marked by moon phases, and in the lives of the Wyrð people the hours of the night were primary, the most important phase of the inner rhythm in which external images are no longer visible, and internal images come to the fore. The secondary realm of day was for the more prosaic mental functions, the analytical considerations of the material world.

In contemporary society, we are visually oriented, and the daytime hours seem to us to be reality, the time where we can see everything, anticipate events, and control our lives. The night time, darkness, is danger, lack of control, presence of the unseen. We have relegated our night hours to 'entertainment' time, whereas daytime is for real work. And yet what we think of as entertainment is often the setting for the most significant business we do in terms of the psychological transactions of our lives, social and personal relationships.

One of the outcomes of today's human-centred viewpoint, in which our 'home range' has become limited to the parameters of the territories we have constructed (towns and cities, television and radio, telephones and faxes, offices and factories, cars and trains, pubs and

restaurants, cinemas and theatres: the territories of *homo sapiens urbanis*) is that we tend to ignore, or even dismiss, influences on our lives, external forces, that we have not created. We are relatively sheltered from the extremes of weather which must have been a prominent feature of the lives of our tribal forebears, for example (apart from the occasional but devastating 'reminders' of tornadoes, hurricanes and earthquakes). Quite understandably, we no longer feel the need to attend to the external natural factors, for they no longer play a significant part in the everyday unfolding of our lives.

Or do they? Are we still aware, at a dimly recognised level, of myriad outside influences filtering in, under, through our cocoon of civilisation?

We know that the moon moves the ocean into tides, but for the people of Wyrd the moon's cycle of power was finely calibrated, and studied in detail. Is their attention to such forces a naïve, romantic notion which intrigues us but which we cannot believe, or is there something in it? A subtle influence does not have to be dramatic and immediate to have substantial impact over the course of a lifetime, and an open-minded, open-hearted, holistic enquiry might yield some surprising findings. Waves beating on a shore do not appear to have immediate impact until one understands how the massive erosional forces of the water have over time dramatically transformed the shape of the coastline. And so, perhaps, the same forces occur over time between the pull of the moon's rhythm and the conduct of our lives. More research into these subtle factors might play an important part in reconnecting us to the environment from which we feel separated and alien.

— Liminal Moments —

For the peoples of ancient Europe, the alternation of night and day, of darkness and light, went well beyond the imprecise and seasonally variable indicators of time that we use now, and carried a highly charged and significant manifesting of a fundamental duality which permeated every sector of life. Daily, monthly, seasonal, annual divisions of experience, which we calibrate in terms of passage of time,

were for the early Europeans demarcations of liminal times, those moments at which the turning of events moved from one state to the other, whether it be night and day, one month or another, summer and winter. These moments of change were experienced as being highly charged, emotional, dangerous, and suffused with sacred power. They were entered with awareness and ritual.

Today, in a Western culture in which Christian observance has been dominant, the rhythm of prayer and observance became weekly, each Sunday. In comparison, the sacred rhythm of the people of Wyrd was more complex and frequent. This is not unusual in itself, of course: in many contemporary religious traditions around the world prayer and meditation are carried out at frequent intervals, at times during the day which have sacred significance.

But the belief and practices of the Wyrd people throw into relief our current behaviour, and it seems to me that most people develop a subconscious 'liminal points' calendar within themselves; not necessarily publicly shared, but nevertheless quite potent. Liminal times would include one's own birthday, and those of family and friends, high points in the year to be marked out in some way. There is in our secular society no particular reason for celebrating the date of one's birth each year; it survives from the customs of the tribespeoples of early Europe, in pre-Christian culture, and is perhaps an indication of just how important are these punctuation points in the flow of psychic time

— Cycles of Time —

Another dimension of the world view of the tribespeople of ancient Europe is their conception of the passage of time. Today we maintain an idea of time as a linear unfolding from the past, through the present and into the future. The people of Wyrd also used this model of time, for it is fundamental to the cause-and-effect sequencing of behaviour in everyday life. However, they regarded it as inadequate for other, more important purposes, like the unfolding of individual lives, or the development of communities. They complemented it with another view: the experiencing of the passage of time as cyclical.

In linear time events from the past are repeated in the future,

although of course we can only experience them in the present, whether through memory, recognition, or anticipation. We exist in the present. In cyclical time this is taken as the starting point.

In contemporary culture, our idea of progress is firmly anchored in our conception of linear time: of things improving from historical time to future time, with us in the middle, in the present, struggling to bring that about. This idea has value, of course, but where we limit our views of the unfolding of life is when we become wedded to one exclusively held perspective. In terms of individual lives, for example, the notion of perpetual self-improvement, a perennial and understandable aim, is probably not best served by viewing one's life as a linear progression. It engenders a way of being in which we are living in the past, regretting mistakes, and anticipating the future, worrying about what might go wrong. It is quite exhausting as a psychological way of experiencing the daily, annual passage of one's life.

The cyclic conception of time, with liminal points of significance and success, searching and failure, often matches a person's life experience more accurately, more sympathetically, more in keeping with the language of experience, which is like a piece of music with repeated chords and movements.

Also, thinking of life in terms of cyclical time encompasses the understanding that themes are repeated, scripts play themselves out, experience is overlapping, and especially that there is to most events and actions a natural lifespan, a season of flowering and dying away, so that everything we do needs rest and renewal, rather than a kind of continuous production of energy like a machine. The articulation of life experience in cyclic rather than linear time might well be of benefit for us in models of counselling and psychotherapy, especially where the deepening of positive experience rather than the progression from bad to good is a main theme of the work. Some of the examples of practical work that I gave earlier in the book addressed these issues.

— The Feminine Principle —

The imagery of the way of Wyrd was a balance between the feminine and masculine principles, the former experienced particularly through

its concentration on the fertile powers of the Earth, the healing qualities of the Earth's surface and sources, the prominence of the goddesses. In considering the implications of this view for contemporary psychology, we need to be aware that archetypal polarities do not translate into gender imperatives in a simple and straightforward way. The feminine and the masculine are principles which impinge on the lives of both men and women.

Nevertheless, having recognised this caveat, it is undeniable that today the forces of the masculine dominate the Western world and a good deal beyond. In the early European culture of the Wyrd people, feminine principles played a more prominent part in their balanced view of life. The Wyrd Sisters, for example, those spinners and arbiters of life to whom even the gods were subject, were represented clearly as sisters, with the biological and bonding implications of this designation. I find it fascinating that this was a primary link between what were arguably the most powerful beings in the cosmos.

Today, in recent times, sisterhood has been rediscovered by some women. It is a bond born of common purpose, shared experience, mutual support and obligation. Sisters speak from the domain of the deep unconscious, and the power and potency of sisterhood is confirmed from the ancient cosmology of the Wyrd people.

— Motherhood —

The Wyrd view of birth reminds us that motherhood is an expression, from within our own species, of a cosmological principle, in which birth of everything is a never-ending process. The welcome advances of scientific medicine which enable us to enhance the safety of mother and child at birth also have the unfortunate effect of anaesthetising us to the miracle of the creation of life. In birthing all creation, the three sisters underscore the state of motherhood as powerful. Motherhood, while having its many prosaic and practical aspects, nevertheless was attuned to in Wyrd culture as being in many ways both the basis and the pinnacle of life.

Today, in a male-dominated obstetric and gynaecological environment in which midwives struggle for recognition, and for permission

to carry out their uniquely suited combination of medical and psychological (sisterly and motherly) support for women giving birth, the way of Wyrd suggests that we need urgently to reconsider our options in how we provide a balance of medical services. It would be naïve and foolish to deny the importance of scientific medicine in offering a safety net both for mother and baby, but our psychological, let alone spiritual, awareness of childbirth is poverty-stricken compared with the awareness of a thousand years ago.

The lesson I draw from our indigenous heritage is that childbirth should be returned to women; midwives ought to be the central figures in the support of the birthing process; scientific medicine should be available as a back-up in medical emergency in the most effective manner possible. Perhaps then we would begin to return some of the power and magnificence, without embarrassment, to the women's secret processes of life creation.

— Female Intuition —

The ancient Europeans had an established tradition of seeresses, generally approved for and practised by women only, and presided over by the goddesses Frigg and especially Freya. Both appear at times as the beneficent goddess helping women and girls at times of marriage and childbirth, as well as shaping the destiny of children. The seeresses were really spirit mediums on missions from the goddess Freya.

In sacred ceremonies in which the spirits revealed mysteries to the seeresses, the women mediated the power that created new life and brought increase into the fields, among the animals, and in the home. They brought also the power to link people with the unseen world, and offered wise counsel granted through divination concerning worldly events.

The seeresses who practised divination were treated with great respect, but men who tried to learn or practise it were castigated. The indigenous peoples of ancient Europe believed that there are secret wisdoms that only men can know, and secrets and wisdoms that reveal themselves only to women. But also, on the path to initiation, there are paths which transcend this divide, where men are led by women

and women by men. The greatest shamans, like Odin, were individuals who transcended the divide, who were initiated into some of the secrets of the opposite gender.

In contemporary society we have at last recognised that the options for women have been restricted and they have been for some time the repressed gender in Western society. In attempting to alleviate this we have sometimes suppressed distinctions between the genders, in psychological, physical, spiritual terms, with the right motives but occasionally, in the view of our ancestors, misguided outcomes. Their perspective on the relationship between the genders was equality in some matters (right to own property, for example) and equal but separate traditions in other areas which deal with, for example, childbirth, and women's mysteries in the realm of sacred psychology.

— The Masculine Principle —

In recent years we have, in contemporary debate, begun to look more closely at the damaging qualities of our over-emphasis on the forces of the masculine. These principles are polarities, operating at the archetypal level of myth. But in making a translation into gender roles, we have also realised that we have lost a sense of how the masculine principle can best be unfolded in the life patterns of men. The tribespeople of ancient Europe offer some provocative models, especially in the figure of Odin and his English (Woden) and German (Wotan) counterparts. Odin was a seeker of truth, and underwent deep psychological and spiritual explorations to achieve the insights that he gained. Much of the interest in rediscovering ways of masculine maturity seem to be inspired by tribal values: drumming, initiation and myth enactment. Our heritage of experience from the times when we were indigenous peoples is a resource yet to be tapped.

— The Pattern of Life —

The world view of the Wyrd tribespeople encompassed an image of supreme interconnectedness. Everything involved and implied everything else in an ecological, holistic vision. They believed that created

for each individual in our inner nature at birth was the frame of a pattern that set our course, and which reflected the interconnectedness of everything. In this view, as individual life patterns are changed, altered, invaded, the emerging new pattern acknowledged the integrity of the existing pattern. It was an organic image of psychological change rather than a mechanistic one.

Today our lives are conceived of as the action of free will to achieve goals which are within our compass. But we also know that the division of life into free will or determinism is a black and white, yes and no, artificially constrained mind-map of immeasurably complex and interacting forces. Wyrð went beyond a simple view of fate. For the tribespeople of ancient Europe, life was a highly charged negotiation between what is free and what is ordained.

The concept of being 'bound' is central to this vision. Today we say that something was 'bound to happen' without awareness of the image we are conjuring up. By this phrase, we mean that the weight of the factors impinging on an event lead almost inevitably to a particular outcome. But the phrase has ancient roots, and in the time of Wyrð it was used with more precise intent. At every moment of our lives we are constrained and limited by the many, unseen 'bonds' we place on ourselves, which have settled into place, twisting and tightening, during our lifetime. They restrict us, handicapping our ability to deal with issues which face us. It is a way of imaging psychodynamics, a way which focuses attention on the restricting nature of aspects of our psychological experience.

Conceiving of psychological forces as bonds or fetters reminds us that 'achieving change' is as often a matter of unwinding or cutting bonds as it is of adding something new. Identifying and removing, shifting, or altering these fetters, ever so subtle and even trivial though they may seem, is the basis of personal freedom.

— The Spirits —

The Otherworld, where the spirits dwelled, are in our parlance, 'states of mind'. But for the early Europeans the premise upon which spirit worlds were conceived differed radically from our views today. They

could never speak of the spirit world as being 'only' in the imagination, as we might now, for the psychological space of the Lowerworld was rather like Jung's collective unconscious – a realm for the deepest of human experiences.

Liminal points provided the boundaries between the everyday state of consciousness and the Otherworld states, in which one was open to communication from the spirit world. Fords across rivers, the ridges of mountains or high hills, the boundaries demarcating tribal lands – all these were charged with magical power and were points through which the mist of the Otherworld could seep into this world. Other liminal points serving as catalysts for psychological shifts between states of consciousness included variations in light at dawn and dusk, turning points in the periodic waxing and waning of the moon, New Year's Day, the summer and winter festivals. All were occasions when the normally unseen powers from the Otherworld were accessible.

Of course, in the process of shamanic initiation visions are not random. They are conditioned, shaped and culturally fired by the structured imagination of the tribal tradition. As the apprentice enters 'heated' body-mind realms, the images that spontaneously arise are interpreted, discussed, and empowered by the shaman. The apprentice's experiences are structured by the poetry of the shaman who sings of the visions, and narrates the action.

This elaborated and highly structured view of modified states of consciousness is rather like a dream psychology, but one which acknowledges the direct power of images to forge changes in everyday life, rather than to see images as symbolic of something other than themselves in the material world. It is an aspect of psychology little developed today, but might yield important insights into the workings of the imagination, dreams, reverie, altered states, and schizophrenia. A new 'Wyrð psychology' beckons.

— Death —

The shamans of ancient northern Europe looked upon the region of the Lowerworld not only as a realm of the dead, but as a source of

great knowledge. In contemporary secular Western culture, where the emphasis is on death as separate from life, we become attached to the concept of self, the idea that we have an existence which will be lost when we die. We will go into nothingness and be no more. The early European shamanic view was different, for nothing died, everything lived on in the Lowerworld. Their image of the realm of the Lowerworld was the Earth in midwinter. It was frozen and everything looked dead, but the Earth was not really dead, for they knew that it came back to 'life' in the spring. The 'death' of the Earth in the winter was really a sham death, a hibernation.

Like the Earth, human life would be reborn, clothed in a new body. Life was a cycle, and everything returned in time, to flower again.

On a psychological level, the Lowerworld mirrored layers of consciousness, going down to the most primitive realms of intuitive knowledge, shared experience which is more than the merely internal. Indeed it is the arena in which we are connected to the organic experience of other species, where all living forms meet.

— The Cosmos and the Psyche —

Odin's visions created, represented, illustrated, reflected the structure of the cosmos. He was not 'there' at the beginning of creation, but rather discovered and articulated the structure of 'everything' as a result of the visions he achieved in his shamanic journeying. It is possible that this structure is a universal human one; that we are constructed to be able to apprehend reality in a particular way, through certain dimensions and in specified forms, and that Odin articulated this. It is also possible that Odin was attuning to something that is outside human consciousness, and was 'seeing' a structure which has a reality in the language of the spirit. However one positions oneself on this dimension, the images Odin describes were to be at the root of much of Wyrð cosmology.

During his quest for visionary experience, Odin saw the cosmos as shaped like a vast tree, which encompassed all levels of existence. Connected to and emanating from this vision is a complex and vivid

system of worlds, realms, levels, each of which symbolically represents a particular kind of knowledge, power and dimension in the spiritual world.

The tree appeared in Odin's vision as a giant ash tree called Yggdrasil, so vast, says Sturluson, that 'its branches spread out over the whole world and reach up over heaven.' This massive construction served as the axis of the cosmos, and everything else was constructed around it. Featured around the tree was the universe, visualised as a tricentric structure, like three gigantic discs set one above the other with a space in between each. This is a vision which shamanic cultures all over the world have seen in the accounts from the intervening centuries. The top disc is conceived of and usually called the Upperworld, the middle one is called Middle Earth or Middle World, and the bottom is the Lowerworld. Structured among these three realms were nine worlds . . . nine places or domains of knowledge, each with a particular ambience and energy. They were conceived of by the people of ancient Europe as locations, space, positions in a cosmic firmament.

The tree into which Odin climbed was visioned as the path to other worlds, other realms, other states, a way of journeying metaphorically from one realm into another. In shamanic cultures the structure of the tree provided the construct for their depiction of the realm of the sacred. And the great tree of imagination, which joined everything together, was called the World Tree.

The World Tree is a sacred image: a Western shamanic version of the meditational images of Tibetan Buddhism. All archetypes, the World Tree included, are image expressions of a deeper level of reality. They do not 'stand for something', like a logo of a company. Their meaning is within the image itself, encompassing myriad nuance and subtleties that can be apprehended by our imagination but beyond the capacity of the conscious mind to process cognitively. The people of ancient Europe thought of the tree as structured holographically, in which every place, every tree – and in fact every human being – is considered to be the essence, the centre. This belief gives rise to a cosmos with a sacred dimension from every aspect, like light shining through a complex crystal, a cosmos in which each detail

represents and incorporates the whole so that everything is related to everything else.

But although we talk of Odin climbing into the World Tree, the tree transforming into a horse and carrying Odin to the worlds of wisdom, it is also important to reverse this process of imagery. It is just as true to say that the imaginal process of horse and Odin journeying to the spirit worlds created the World Tree. The World Tree was also a construction of the shaman's making.

In our contemporary discourse we would conceive of these worlds as being located in our psyche, perhaps deep in the unconscious. The imaginal structure of the World Tree, and the process of imagining journeying on the tree as it transforms into a magical horse, would be tools and techniques for entering and accessing areas of the unconscious which might otherwise be closed to us except in the most deeply symbolic dreams.

For the early Europeans, the concept of the imaginal was not physically bounded by the body, was not thought of as 'only' an internal event. For the peoples of Wyrd the everyday, logical, analytical, material world was a tiny microcosm of the magnificent, boundless imaginal world. Shamans were expected to be able to journey, and act, in the latter on behalf of the community.

Today we are expending considerable effort trying to redress the imbalance we have created of 'them and us', in which we pose as being 'separate' from the world for the purposes of scientific observation and analysis, and 'joining' ourselves back into contact, thinking ourselves back into relationship with the environment. Our human-centred, separatist view has brought us great benefits through science and engineering, but it has brought also great disadvantages, not least in our very poorly developed sense of self-understanding which is perhaps the most crucial challenge facing us. We need to understand ourselves once more in relation not only to the physical, organic environment from which we have separated ourselves, but also from the cosmos in which our imaginal powers might afford us spiritual insights which will give direction to our lives. Odin's visions are an awe-inspiring example of what we were once capable.

We need to value more highly the talents of those who are able to

journey in and articulate the languages of the imaginal: actors, storytellers, artists, dancers, musicians, writers, film-makers, poets. These are crucial to our re-enchantment.

— Keeping Our Heads —

I here reprise some of the points I made earlier in the book concerning 'losing our heads'. I believe that important lessons lie here awaiting our discovery.

Giving up an eye is an intriguing pledge. Our two eyes, used together, provide perspective. Certainly in modern Western society, sight is the primary sense that we employ in maintaining our everyday reality – the waking state of consciousness. Under altered states such as meditation, hypnosis, drug-induced, other senses come into more prominence, and sight of the material world may be a minor or even absent factor. So one way of regarding Odin's sacrifice, his pledge, is that in giving up an eye on his way to initiation, Odin is making an investment in altered reality.

The beheading game was one in which the two protagonists 'surrendered their heads' to the other, gave themselves into each other's power, absolutely, in a form of bonding. To make oneself so vulnerable as to have one's head chopped off by an 'adversary', on the understanding that it can be put back on again is a truly remarkable level of trust. It must be akin to the notion of 'blood brother' which has survived into modern culture. This latter contains no hint of rebirth, but rather the notion that self-inflicted wounds can lead to a sharing of blood in a bonding ritual.

Finally, one more perspective rounds out the picture. For if the life force of a person resides in the head, then the taking of that head adduces the power of the person to the taker. It is not just a count of success, it is a taking of that power for oneself. And if the Anglo-Saxons believed in a spiritual soul-matter which pervades the whole body but is concentrated in the head, a soul-matter which maintains all life, then the taking of a head brings also the effectiveness of the soul-matter to the taker and his people. This is in effect what happens when Odin takes Mimir's head and uses its wisdom for his and the Aesirs' good.

For us, the dynamics of 'keeping our head' in times of trouble, 'sticking our necks out' to take risks, and the complexities of obligations, pacts, deals and trust, are all stirred up by Odin's ritual encounters with the wise giant Mimir.

— Sacred Love —

Odin sought the mead of inspiration, the essence of creative and poetic potency, which fired the imaginations of shamans throughout history. He carried out his quest for the mead on behalf of his community of gods, the Middle Earth community of shamans-to-be, and the cosmos as a whole. The mead symbolises that essence in Wyrð represented by the pearl in Tantric art. Life force was a subtle energy which gave access to wisdom, healing powers, and the ability to enter a radically altered state of consciousness: the spirit world. This was accomplished by journeying to the depths of the Underworld – deep heritage – and integrating the forces of life, the ice and fire, to embody the essence of dragon. And then the task was to journey up the World Tree through Middle Earth to the upper reaches, where through self-sacrifice of a sort the dragon-powered life force turned the shaman into an eagle and he could fly.

And since the achievement of the mead of knowledge, resulting in Odin transforming from a serpent into an eagle, is cast so clearly in sexual terms with his winning the love of Gunnloth, the possibility of a ritual of love seems plausible. I believe that the seat of Odin's wisdom is love. And when Gunnloth, in Odin's words, 'Sat in the golden seat, and poured me precious mead', the mead was formed from their sex together. The golden seat was the sexual position during intercourse, and the precious mead was the nectar of their subtle energies produced by their union.

Clearly the quality of nature's productivity was seen through the pulsating perspective of sexuality, especially in the presence of the goddesses Frigg and Freya, and the practice of shamanic initiation, as described in the previous chapter, between Odin and Gunnloth. This viewpoint is quite different from our contemporary models of psychological sexuality, which are mostly derived from the principles

of psychodynamics developed by Freud. The Wyrð perspective was closer to those traditional disciplines of transpersonal psychology which characterise the Eastern ways of spiritual liberation, such as Tantra and Tao. These elaborated ways of action see the experience of sacred and ritualised sexual intercourse as symbolic of, and a metaphor for, the balance and forces of polarities in the cosmos. Sexual experience in this context is a transcending of opposites, a uniting of the separate into one.

Overtly sexual metaphors for the dynamics of the natural world seem alien to us. We are now much more accustomed to scientific metaphors, in which the stories of nature are recounted in a more objective fashion. In seeking to restore a consciousness in which we are once again connected to the Earth, perhaps we can rediscover love. If we equally value, and complement our objective understanding of the world with poetic metaphor, artistic vision, dramatic involvement, language modalities which are much more appropriate to aesthetic, deep psychological and sacred dimensions of the natural world than the mechanistic calibrational language of scientific discourse, then we might learn again how to apply the language of love to ourselves and the world.

— The Wisdom of the Wyrð —

In one book it is possible only to touch the surface of a subject as all-encompassing as the world view of an indigenous people. And then there is of course all that material which we simply do not know about, or have no evidence for. Research goes on, and gradually we may know more. But I think that the recognition that once we were indigenous peoples ourselves is an important step, and the acknowledgement that our ancestors may have something worthwhile for us to learn from them. At the moment recognition of this fact is hampered by our assumption of a linear view of progress: that we have left our past far behind us, and that it has no value today.

I believe that it is emphatically clear from the material reviewed in this book that our own traditions of tribal lore are rich with significance still; a thousand years is a long time, but fifty generations

connect us with those times past, with the wisdom of our ancestors. Certainly there have been important gains for Western cultures since those times, but there have been important losses, too. We need to ask what it is that we once knew that we have long forgotten, and reassess how may it help us today.

What the journey of this book has shown, I hope, is that in invigorating, informing and inspiring a sacred way for today, and for all our tomorrows, a crucial step is the rediscovery of the wisdom of the Wyrd.